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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000139

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: IRINA KOZULINA DIES, FUNERAL AWAITS HUSBAND'S
RELEASE

REF: A) 07 Minsk 142

B) Minsk 120 (and previous)

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

1. (C) Irina Kozulina, wife of political prisoner and former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, died February 23 from breast cancer. Kozulin's daughters have officially requested his release to participate in the funeral, tentatively scheduled for February 26. The family reportedly will not bury Irina until Aleksandr has been released, and both Aleksandr and his daughters have announced hunger strikes that will commence if he is not released February 25. Embassy has issued a condolence statement that repeats USG calls for the release of all political prisoners. End Summary.

Irina Kozulina Succumbs to Breast Cancer

2. (C) Irina Kozulina, 48, wife of imprisoned former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin died Saturday evening, February 23, after a long battle with breast cancer. Based on embassy communication with family members and representatives of Kozulin's Belarusian Social Democratic Party-Gramada (BSDP-G), Irina Kozulina's health had been in steep decline since the start of this year. In addition to severe weight loss in recent days she had also experienced loss of vision. Throughout her illness, Kozulina bravely advocated both for her husband's freedom and for increased breast cancer awareness in Belarus (ref A).

3. (U) Following news of Kozulina's death, Embassy issued the following statement of condolences, repeating calls for the release of political prisoners.

-- The U.S. Embassy notes with sadness the passing of Irina Kozulina. Irina bravely used her long fight with breast cancer to increase awareness of this terrible disease in Belarusian society. The Embassy offers sincere condolences to her husband, political prisoner Aleksandr Kozulin, and her two daughters Olga and Yuliya and repeats its call for the release of all political prisoners.

Funeral Plans Await Release of Aleksandr Kozulin

4. (C) While tentative plans have been made for a wake February 25 and a funeral the following day in Minsk,

Kozulin's daughter Olga told various press sources that the family would not hold her mother's funeral until her father had been released. Aleksey Karol, a friend of the family and a co-founder of BSDP-G told A/DCM that Kozulin's daughters had requested his release for the funeral and that daughter Yuliya had told him no services would be held until their father had been released. (Note: Press sources confirm that the family's request for Kozulin's release is in the hands of Belarusian Interior Minister Naumov. End note.)

Hunger Strikes Possible, If Release Fails to Occur

15. (SBU) Both Kozulin and his daughters have announced plans to conduct hunger strikes in the event Kozulin is not released. In a statement attributed to Kozulin and posted to his website, the BSDP-G leader said that if not released he would refuse both food and liquids and could be buried together with his wife in six or seven days.

Comment

16. (C) By failing to release Aleksandr Kozulin before his wife's death (ref B), the Lukashenko regime has created a nightmare for itself. Should they release Kozulin -- as the USG has advocated both publicly and privately -- they face the very real risk of being seen as responding to the domestic pressure of hunger strikes. Should they decide against release, they face a backlash from Belarusian society that is unlikely to understand such callousness in the face of human tragedy. Most importantly, failure to release Kozulin would be a clear sign the Belarusian regime is not prepared for real progress on human rights and

MINSK 00000139 002 OF 002

democracy reform, and would be all but an invitation to strengthen USG sanctions.

Stewart